

Alcohol and Drug Abuse

Substance abuse is a concern for most parents, educators, law enforcement, and policy makers. Tennessee began participating in the national Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) in the early 1990s. In 1999, Tennessee began using weighted data to give a more accurate portrayal of how Tennessee teens compare to other states in teen substance use and abuse patterns. The YRBS combines questions about youth behavior, such as violence, sexual activity, nutrition, and safety. As a result, although it is the most consistent and comprehensive source of information that we have on a state level, the focus on substance-use patterns and reasons for use is limited.

The Youth Risk Behavior Survey is one component of the Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System developed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in collaboration with representatives from state and local departments of Education and Health, 19 other federal agencies, and national education and health organizations. Students complete a self-administered 87-item questionnaire. Survey procedures allow for anonymous and voluntary participation. Local parental permission procedures are followed before survey administration.

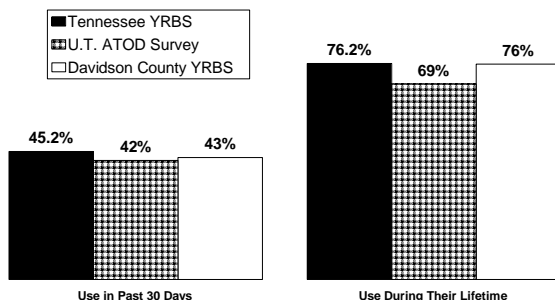
The Tennessee State Department of Education administers the survey during odd-numbered years. In 1999, 1,519 students in 37 high schools in Tennessee completed the survey. Due to high participation rates, the 1999 YRBS is weighted, meaning the results can be generalized to the entire high school student population in the state. *Note: Davidson County conducts its own survey, and is **NOT** included in the state-level data.

Because of the limited information available from the YRBS specific to substance use and abuse patterns, it is helpful to look at another study completed by the Department of Health and the University of Tennessee in 1995/1997, the Alcohol Tobacco and Other Drugs High School Survey (ATOD). The ATOD survey was a statewide study completed nearly three years ago that attempted to present a comprehensive look at the substance use and abuse patterns of Tennessee youth.

The statewide study was a two-wave study of teens in Tennessee in 1995 and again in 1997 indicating that 69 percent of the sample group (n = 102,232) reported using alcohol at some point in their lives. The drugs that followed behind alcohol were cigarettes, with 63 percent reporting use; any illegal drug, at 43 percent; and marijuana, at 38 percent over a lifetime.

The sample group was composed of ninth through 12th graders in 196 schools in 91 counties throughout the state. The survey was designed to fulfill the mandated requirements for statewide and regional needs assessment for Alcohol, Tobacco, and Other Drugs (ATOD) treatment among 13 to 19-year-olds. In addition, data were collected to identify behavioral risk factors and physical and mental health problems.

Comparison of State YRBS, Davidson County YRBS, and ATOD Study
Alcohol Use in the Past 30 days and During Their Lifetime, Grades 7 to 12



Source: YRBS Tennessee Department of Education 1999, YRBS Davidson County Department of Health and Davidson County schools 1999, ATOD Tennessee Department of Health and UT Community Health Research Group 1995/1997.

The study was developed as a part of a family of studies to provide comprehensive and accurate scientific data on levels and patterns of ATOD use and abuse statewide and by region for use by state and local officials and communities,